



Testimony of Steven Zuckerman

Chief Executive Officer, Root Center for Advanced Recovery

RE: H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

In regards to the SUD Waiver, DSS Budget

Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee, February 23, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Steven Zuckerman and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Root Center for Advanced Recovery.

The Root Center is the largest provider of methadone maintenance treatment services in Connecticut. With ten locations across the state and serving over 5,500 patients daily, the Root Center has undergone expansion in recent years to continue to provide a broader continuum of both addiction and mental health treatment to support the growing opioid epidemic, as well as a burgeoning mental health crisis due to the pandemic.

I am here today to testify on funding for the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Waiver that is included in the midterm budget adjustments and the need to enhance the funding to be inclusive of new services that are clearly needed in response to the continued opioid crisis.

The need for the overall waiver and expansion is evidenced by overdose deaths. Those deaths have increased from 357 to 1,374 between 2012 and 2021. Since COVID was declared a national emergency, there has been a 33% increase in substance use drug overdoses. Although tracking data is not done, Root Center estimates that approximately 300 of its current patients missed an opportunity for residential treatment in the past year.

In FY 2020, there were 127 state-wide substance use intensive residential rehabilitation beds at 102% capacity. The aforementioned data does not capture those clients who were turned away due to no capacity, or when capacity reemerged, were no longer in a position of willingness/readiness to accept the treatment.

Pursuant to the waiver, clinical services for Medicaid and the funding for the “room and board” portion of a person’s residential stay are billed separately. The Root Center has the desire to expand into a variety of additional service lines to further support our non-profit mission of treating underserved and marginalized populations more comprehensively. One of those areas is to provide more residential services for our clients and the community at large.

Unfortunately, the budget before you for residential treatment beds is based solely on current providers and does not fully budget for adding new services such as residential treatment. We currently do not provide residential services but see the need that our patients and others in the future may have in parts of the state.

Without the full reimbursement, new providers of these important services are less inclined to come forward. We should be incentivizing such service providers to come forward especially in a challenging economic environment.

As you move forward, we would urge you to take a more comprehensive look at the SUD waiver budget and ensure that new programs such as residential treatment can be started. The opioid crisis has continued to wreak havoc on families and communities, and we should not lose the opportunity to fully take advantage of the new waiver.

I am available for further discussion and can be emailed at steven.zuckerman@rootcenter.org.

Thank you for your consideration and the focus on this important initiative.

Steven Zuckerman, MA, LPC
President & CEO, Root Center for Advanced Recovery (a trade name of The Hartford Dispensary)
335 Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Manchester, CT 06040
860-643-3242